

FOOD ALLERGY FACT SHEET

Overview of Food Allergies

What is a food allergy?

A food allergy is when the body mistakenly reacts to a certain food or ingredient as if it were harmful. The food that causes the reaction is called an allergen.

What are the symptoms of a food allergy reaction?

Symptoms can happen within a few minutes or up to a few hours after being eaten, inhaled, or coming in contact with the allergen. Symptoms can be seen or felt in different parts of the body.

- Hives (reddish, swollen, itchy areas on the skin)
- Skin rash of eczema
- Swelling of the tongue or throat and difficulty breathing
- Itching in the mouth, throat, or ear canal
- Abdominal cramps, nausea, diarrhea, and/or vomiting
- Nasal congestion or a runny nose
- Sneezing or slight, dry cough
- Odd taste in the mouth
- Trouble swallowing
- Shortness of breath, turning blue
- Drop in blood pressure (feeling faint, confused, weak, passing out)
- Loss of consciousness
- Chest pain
- A weak or “thready” pulse
- Sense of “impending doom”
- Anaphylaxis
- Death

What is anaphylaxis?

Anaphylaxis is a serious reaction that happens quickly. Anaphylaxis can involve many different parts of the body. The most severe symptoms can restrict breathing and blood circulation and may cause death.



What are the most common foods that cause allergic reactions?

The most common foods include:

- Milk
- Eggs
- Peanuts
- Tree nuts (for example, walnuts, almonds, cashews, pistachios, and pecans)
- Wheat
- Soy
- Fish
- Crustacean shellfish (for example, shrimp, lobster, and crab)

How are food allergies diagnosed?

A qualified medical professional, such as an allergist or physician, can diagnose food allergies by using a variety of tests.

How are allergic reactions treated?

Reactions should be treated according to the student’s Food Allergy Action Plan/Emergency Care Plan. Antihistamines and other medicines can be used. In severe cases, epinephrine should be given as soon as possible. Always call 911!

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How can an allergic reaction be avoided?

The best way to avoid a reaction is to avoid the food that causes the allergy. Develop a system for checking ingredient labels carefully and have a plan to limit the ways in which the child could have contact with the allergens, including airborne.

What is cross-contact?

Cross-contact happens when food containing an allergen comes in contact with food or surface that does not contain an allergen. For example, using a knife to spread peanut butter and using that same knife for cutting a turkey sandwich without properly cleaning in between could transfer peanut allergens.

References

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For More Information

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Voluntary Guidelines for Managing Food Allergies in Schools and Early Care and Education Programs
<http://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/foodallergies/>
- Institute of Child Nutrition
<http://www.theicn.org/foodsafety>
- U.S. Department of Agriculture
<http://www.usda.gov>
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration
Food Allergens
<https://www.fda.gov/food/food-ingredients-packaging/food-allergens>

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